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# CENTURY

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# London Discovers "Uncle Abe"

By STACY AUMONIER

*London has taken over the spirit of Abraham Lincoln and now shares its influence with the United States. Historians, poets, and dramatists write of the great American. All London, and soon all England, will be happier and wiser in knowing about "the great heart of humanity."*



AN event is happening in London which every American ought to know of. It may not in itself appear to be of great importance, but on reflection it becomes a matter of pregnant significance. In an obscure suburb, buried away among shops and booths, is a small theater with the somewhat grandiloquent title of the Lyric Opera House. A year or so ago not one Londoner in ten thousand could have told you where the Lyric Opera House was. Then one day some enthusiasts from Birmingham, with a passion for reforming the stage, came to London. Finding themselves crowded out of all the West End theaters, where revues and pajama farces were in complete sway, they came across this obscure theater and put on a play. It was a purely experimental play, the kind of thing that any theatrical expert would have prophesied as being good for a few matinées, or probably a week's run at a loss. The play concerned the life of an American. It is true, it was a great—probably the greatest American who ever lived. But that was all it was. It could not be called a good play in any sense. It certainly had none of the ingredients of a popular success. There was no plot, no sensational development, very little humor, and, strangest of all, no love interest. It just portrayed the character, and some of the human episodes in the political career, of a rugged man.

But the Londoner, who is slow in the uptake, but persistent when he wants a thing, gradually began to trace his footsteps, as though compelled by some mesmeric force, in the direction of the

Lyric Opera House. To say that the play caught on would be too mild a way of expressing the peculiar grip which the life of Abraham Lincoln has got upon us. London has fallen under the spell of "Uncle Abe." The thing has been an enormous popular success. It has been going on months, and still every performance is crowded out. Only last week a bishop drove up. He had come to town specially from the country to see the play, and he could not get a seat! Now everybody knows the Lyric Opera House and is anxious to direct you thither. But it is n't only the box-office which interests us. The play has been more than a popular success. It has been a symbol, an inspiration.

The people who crowd the theater are not a clique of literary or theatrical dilettante; they are the people. You see them sitting there in rows,—the seats are all low-priced,—mixed up and familiar, princes and publicans, bankers, bishops (I hope he got a seat the next night), clerks and green-grocers, horsy-looking men and poets, little shop girls and old duchesses. They are peculiarly silent, thrilled, moved. If you ask them, they can't tell you why, but they say, "It's wonderful," and they go away and come again and again.

How much of this wonder may be due to the genius of Mr. John Drinkwater, who wrote the play and produced it, or to the clever company who interpret it, is difficult to determine. I have spoken to hundreds of people who have been, and many have criticized the acting or the producing or the play itself; but I have not met one who did not think that somehow it was "wonderful" and

they wanted to go again. The solution may be that in the mind of Abraham Lincoln we find a salve, healing the complicated disruption of our own present troubles. The conditions are somewhat analogous. We observe the reactions of our own distresses through this spectacle of great simplicity. It is as though we had been groping in the dark for something which we had lost, when a friend appears who produces an electric torch, and we observe that that which we had lost is lying at our feet. We recall the phenomena of our own upheaval, the basic causes of war and civil strife. The greed and intolerance of those in high places, the insincerity and chop-logic of politicians, the sycophantic attitude of place-seekers, the machinations of profiteers, the fear and cowardice and heroism of the individual man, and through it all this one simple man, of inflexible purpose, high courage, broad vision, and unbounded humanity. His horror and loathing of war permeate the play. He is incapable of bitterness and hatred. He can hate only an idea. He represents to us what is best in us, the attitude we ourselves would like to take in our best moments. When the dear old society lady rejoices in the slaughter of many thousands of "these disgusting rebels,"—we can almost hear her say "disgusting Huns,"—the heart of Lincoln is as nearly stirred to hate as it is capable of. He turns on her in a flood of scorn and orders her from the house. That was not the spirit in which he plunged his country into war. Men were dying that a broader humanity might emerge. The colored man should be free, the brother of the white man, not the slave. All men were equal in the sight of God, and all men must obey the dictates of this human impulse. Let justice be done though the heavens fall, but justice with mercy, and with your eye always fixed upon the ultimate goal.

It was an American who toasted "Our country. In her intercourse with foreign nations may she always be in the right; but our country, right or wrong."

But Lincoln was bigger than that. And it is because we believe that he was bigger than that that we rejoice in him. We do not believe that he would have backed his country in what he believed

to be an unjust war. He would have been a rebel. He would rather have died at the stake. One sees in him the birth of a force acting socially rather than nationally. That is why in these days when national issues are involved and confused, when they who, we are told by our governments, are one day our friends and another day our enemies, we turn to Lincoln as we would turn to a draft of water at a surfeited banquet in an overheated room. And there dawns upon us at the Lyric Opera House a new and comforting generalization. It is this: there could never be serious trouble between England and America, because the day is dawning when things are acting socially rather than nationally. The workers of the world are becoming as great a force as governments themselves, indeed greater. It will no longer be possible to wave a flag, put head-lines in the newspapers, and send a band into the street and say, "We are at war!" Government is going to be by the people and for the people. There might conceivably be some quite serious point of dispute between the governments, but the people will require to know all about it. And then there will be a national cleavage. Parties will be formed on each side favoring the other country's point of view. There will be no national unity in the old sense. The world—or in any case, for the time being, *our* world—will act socially.

That which is called "industrial unrest" is not a purely material thing. It does not concern only work and wages. It is a spiritual revolt. Five million men were slain on the battle-fields of Europe, and nine tenths of those men were sent to their deaths without being consulted or without fully understanding the fundamental cause of the strife. And this holocaust has made the people of these various countries suspicious. They are for the most part patient, long-suffering people, good sportsmen, quite willing to die in a good cause; but they are beginning to feel that if this sort of thing is going to happen often, they would like to know all about it. Indeed, they would like to be consulted. Incidentally, they want to make it impossible to happen again.

The London cockney made as good

showing in the war as any, and he was in it from the very first. He is not very clever perhaps, but he 's no fool. He does n't believe all the newspapers tell him. The war has broadened his outlook considerably. He has rubbed shoulders with every other national, white and colored, in all parts of the world. Whereas before he may not have traveled farther than from Putney to the Welsh Harp, or from Hendon to Brighton, now he is familiar with France and Italy, Greece, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and India. He has boxed with Australians, made love to French girls, and swapped cigarettes with German prisoners. Death has been his near and familiar companion for four and a half years. And on the top of it all he is thoroughly surfeited with *cant*. These newspapers and old ladies and arm-chair patriots, phew! Suddenly he finds himself listening to some one he understands, a big and simple citizen like himself, albeit a foreigner. A fine old boy, "Uncle Abe." No nonsense about him. He does n't get tied up in a knot with highfalutin rhetoric. He has n't got one eye on the enemy and the other on the next general election. He does n't say one thing and mean another. He 's big, universal, and his spirit is communicable.

This is what the cockney thinks, the cockney who has seen the world and carried other men's burdens upon his back. And his spirit, too, is communicable. That is why the dowager duchesses go, too, and the war exploiters and

the old clubmen and the arm-chair patriots. They go and feel humbled, universal, as though their spirit were being transposed from the minor key of their small self-centered lives into a broader key of a great composition. They cannot remain unmoved, and so, while they cannot explain it, they say it 's "wonderful."

Yes, London has fallen to "Uncle Abe." The curtain has come down on the great drama, and our voices are hushed. We know that it is too soon for its significance to come home to us. We are still dazed and bewildered. The eager faces of the young men who will never return are still with us. The sound of their laughter is still fresh in our ears. In such a condition men cannot think or forget or even remember. It will take a hundred years. And so they dance and dance and dance, as though they were trying to readjust the normal rhythm of human intercourse, so long a broken discord. And when everything seems meaningless, what better occupation can there be than dancing? In time the systole and the diastole will resume its healthy beat. Beneath the hatred and malice and misunderstanding we are learning to know that, as Nurse Cavell discovered, "Patriotism is not enough." Beneath it all there remains the great heart of humanity, the great heart of Lincoln, beating for our eternal good. London is wiser and better and vastly happier for her discovery of "Uncle Abe."

## Divination

By JOHN DRINKWATER

Have you sometimes a lonely heart,  
And secret sorrows to endure?  
And do you lie sometimes apart,  
With fears no friendliness could cure?

My love of twenty years not yet  
Has that devotion forfeit made  
Of those dear sessions where we met  
So often and so unafraid.

Go not alone in any grief,  
Make me your fond confessor still,  
Touch not with weary unbelief  
The wit and service of my will.

Your silence yet no silence knows,  
No track you make but I must find,  
And every fear you suffer throws  
Its shadow through my wedded mind.

My needs have been your daily cares;  
Bring now your needs to me no less.  
You who have pitied my despairs  
Will pity now my tenderness.

Grieve not apart, nor think you can.  
No trysting-place so rare, so lone,  
But there, the shadow of a man,  
With you and grief I shall be known.

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